

Soviet Responses to the US Strategic Defense Initiative

The US Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) announcement in March 1983 caught the Soviets by surprise both in its focus on strategic defense R&D in the US, by the heavy commitment called for by the program, and perhaps most importantly, by the long-term implications if the US adopts a strategic policy embracing strategic defense--an area in which the Soviets have enjoyed a near-monopoly. The uncertainties of the nature and extent of possible changes in US strategy and force posture compound the complexities facing Soviet decisionmakers as they begin consideration of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (1986-90). Their inclination must naturally be to build their forces for the 1990s as previously planned, yet they must hedge against SDI. The planning problem for them is how to translate this into specific decisions, while avoiding zigs and zags in their programs. While we cannot predict what specific course the Soviets will follow over the next 20-30 years in attempting to counter SDI and develop comparable systems, we can identify potential actions and assess early signs of these. [REDACTED]

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We have recently received the first indications that the Soviets have reallocated funds and redirected technology research efforts to counter the US SDI and further develop their own such defensive systems. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Soviet actions seem to have been chosen for their plausibility. We believe Soviet R&D provides a solid basis for developing both potential countermeasures and advanced defensive systems. [REDACTED]

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It is not surprising that the Soviets are taking steps to refocus technical efforts to begin to counter SDI, if it were to be developed and deployed. It is surprising, however, that they provided such explicit information on what they are doing. This information was probably provided deliberately as part of the overall Soviet propaganda campaign against SDI. The Soviets clearly wish to convey serious intent to match any new US military capabilities in space, and to imply that the US will not gain any net advantage from its efforts. [REDACTED]

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--One aspect of this campaign, spearheaded by Ye. P. Velikhov, is aimed at undercutting the US SDI programs by claiming that it is technically unachievable. (Note that Velikhov is actually a major player in the Soviet high energy laser program.)

--A second part [REDACTED] claims that the Soviets are prepared to match our moves in SDI and are developing countermeasures that will make it fail.

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--A third part is to claim that the US is upsetting the strategic balance and planning for a nuclear war-winning capability, and to threaten a Soviet response, including some day shooting down SDI space platforms. [REDACTED]

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The reference to a ground-based laser to be ready in three years--presumably for testing--is plausible. [REDACTED]

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